

# The day after

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

THE 10th Parliamentary election was marked by widespread violence. The voter turnout was abysmally low and voting in a number of polling centres has been suspended. The turmoil prior to, and on the day of the poll, gradually built up to a maelstrom. Many innocent people and political desperados lost their lives.

How long the turbulence will continue is a matter of common concern. There is so much anger in the confrontation that even an incurable optimist may not have enough courage to hope for a new journey marked by political engagement with goodwill and trust. The future cannot be conceived without the sincere participation of the two major actors in constitutional politics. The doomsday soothsayers, however, foresee a declaration of emergency followed by a good spanking of the opposition and punishment of war criminals.

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Party.

What is the cause of the antipathy between the two parties? There is not much difference between them. They are centrist parties with emphasis on private sector initiative. AL was a socialist party during Bangabandhu's rule with Soviet Russia as the principal ally. Things have changed greatly since his tragic end, and more so with the liquidation of the Soviet legacy. Nonetheless, India and Russia are considered as allies. AL is a secularist party but will not go against the country's Islamic demographic character. BNP discarded socialism from the beginning. It emphasises Islamic belief on paper but functions like a secularist party.

The fundamental difference between the two parties is that AL upholds Bengali language and culture as its principal identity. For BNP both the Bangali and the Islamic identities have a place in Bangladeshi nationalism. The use of theocratic party Jamaat-e-Islami as an ally is a matter of expedience and convenience. For AL, Jamaat-e-Islami is not a natural ally. It was a matter of expedience when AL enlisted its support for caretaker government (CTG) movement during 1994-'96 movement.

It can be said that interaction between the two

parties is not an insurmountable divide of intractable nature. In a parliamentary democracy, if the principal contenders do not engage each other it is a negation of democratic practice. What holds Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia back? Is it the difference over the nature of the interim government under which the national poll was to be held?

Sheikh Hasina would not go beyond the constitutional process. The CTG system was annulled by the Supreme Court. The parliament discarded it through an amendment. However, the Supreme Court annulment verdict did not altogether rule out the applicability of CTG. Instead, it proposed an interim government formed on 50:50 basis, i.e. equal representations of the government and the opposition, that retains the incumbent prime minister. Fine indeed! But the prime minister would reserve the right to overrule instructions of any member of the cabinet.

The PM's gesture of offering any ministry to the opposition was praiseworthy but with the bucket having no bottom. Khaleda Zia, on the other hand, would not have anything but a CTG. In 1994-'96 BNP opposed CTG concept. In 2013-'14 Sheikh Hasina would not have anything to do with CTG. If this is the difference then there is hope of consensus on holding 11th national election.

In a democracy, the concept of inducting an un-elected government to conduct the national poll that leads to the formation of an elected government is not above question. The election machinery aided by administration and law enforcing agencies, unless of course not brazenly politicised, is there to hold the election. That is what countries with well-regarded democratic practice do. Bangladesh should have done in 1996 what the government in power stubbornly stuck to for the 2014 national poll. BNP government spoilt it in 1996 with Magura bye-election. While AL, by wholesale politicisation of every wing of administration, has lost its credibility as a fair overseer. The chief election commissioner looked on woefully without his moral robe.

Over the years, confidence in the moral probity of each and every government was unwholesomely compromised. The bitter harvest is the present impasse. During BNP's last tenure the August 21 carnage was a wound that soured relations forever.

On the other hand BNP, was brutalised remorselessly during AL's last tenure. Its leaders from all tiers were packed into jails on several occasions. Some went missing and are still untraceable. Their party office was vandalised in a fierce manner. The editor of their party paper has been behind bars for a long time.

The 10th national poll was held with more than half of its voters (over 4 and a half crores) being deprived of voting opportunity. A country-wide election of 100 million voters involves quite a large expenditure. It can be in hundreds of crores of Taka. That is people's money.

The most important prayer will be for the slugfest to end and a way forward charted by the contending parties in trust and goodwill. No one gives political parties the charter to cash in on the patience of the people!

The writer is a former advertising professional.

## QUOTEABLE Quote

*The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river.*

# Hype and truth about Bangladesh-India relations

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

The hype around the dynamics of India-Bangladesh relation is often overdone. It seems that we Bangladeshis are both India-maniac and also Indo-phobic. For anything and everything happening in Bangladesh we find an India correlation, as if we ourselves are a non-entity and some mysterious pull of strings from Delhi dictates every move of ours. This fallacious obsession impacts objective reasoning and decision making.

Much of our approximation is based on the overestimation of the power of the Indian state and being completely oblivious of its inner weakness that the very state itself is afraid of. Obsession about the neighbouring big brother is a kind of small neighbour syndrome that many other smaller neighbours of bigger states suffer from. Yet our preoccupation with Delhi is extraordinarily acute.

Indian central power is much weaker nowadays with successive loosely bonded coalition governments having been in Delhi for the last several years. Bordering provinces often

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dicate foreign policy, a purely union government subject as per Indian constitution. Tamil Nadu is a burning example. Demagogic Trinamool Congress is doing the same with regards to Bangladesh.

Indian foreign policy is sometimes incoherent. Few months back an Indian foreign ministry official openly admitted that it was India's fault for not being able to deliver on key bilateral issues with Bangladesh. Such a state of affairs was unthinkable in the past. Sheikh Hasina responded by not granting transit to India.

There is a perception in Bangladesh that India is calling the shots, i.e. dictating the actions of the AL government. The skeptics think that they are not doing enough to support democracy in Bangladesh despite being very influential over the Bangladeshi incumbents. But how can the Indian government get such leverage? Trade-wise, India is more of an exporter to Bangladesh than an importer of Bangladeshi goods. Rather, the West has this economic tool at their disposal to pressurise

the Bangladesh government, if they want. But that, of course, will bring sufferings for ordinary citizens as well.

India doesn't command things in relation to Bangladeshi domestic politics. Rather it seems that India, more or less, follows what Sheikh Hasina desires where Bangladesh is concerned. The intelligent Indians, like the Americans, understand that AL has indulged in a dicey gamble to mitigate the political mess they have made in the last five years through the prolonged war crimes trials and poor performance in governance.

But options for India are limited. The weak coalition government is bound to be conservative about Indian interest in relation to Bangladesh, especially in this election year. AL, reading the Indian mind, has been able to tie them in a manipulative way to try delivering on some Indian concerns. The Indian government, due to Mamata Banerjee's stubbornness, has failed to deliver on key bilateral issues. This has reduced Indian leverage on AL government further.

The Islamist bogey and north-east Indian insurgents cards have done it all for AL. It's also true that the West values India's position on many regional issues. AL knows that, in crisis situations, India can't abandon a secular political force in Bangladesh because an abrupt fall of such a party could spell greater dangers for India. But Indian support may not be there because of AL's and stubbornness and if AL gets too unpopular and isolated. But for BNP to expect that the present Congress-led coalition government would go out of the way at this time to support their cause is perhaps expecting too much, given the incident of ten truckload arms haul in their last tenure in power.

It would be wise not to focus so much on India for the simple reason that it undermines the people's power in Bangladesh. If the people of this country genuinely want the ouster of AL, the latter will fall. That public intention could only be successful if the people came out in the streets en masse. India has no capacity to do anything in such a situation, if it arises at all.

We need to understand who is the actor who holds maximum agency in the current complex scenario of Bangladesh. With systematic cooption and politicisation of the state organs, it is the incumbent leader who has amassed all the state power and authority at her disposal. Her desperation stems from various facts, ranging from attempts on her life to the incomplete task of cleansing the anti-liberation forces out of Bangladeshi polity for good. Democratic compromise between AL and BNP is almost a certainty in the near future in this West-dominated world system. The AL supremo is the one who is indeed calling the shots; the Indians are an ancillary to her in this game.

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### For Further Information, Please Contact

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## QUOTEABLE Quote

*The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river.*

Ross Perot

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

30	Citrus quaff	DOWN	22	"Hondo" star
31	Dyeing place	24	Bullring call	25
32	Tiny	27	Tell tales	Having the
33	Drink with	3	choice	most rain
34	scones	31	Campaign goal	33
35	Be quiet!"	35	Walk in the	woods
36	Spare	36	Trade fair	34
37	Similar	37	Turn sharply	35
38	Asparagus unit	38	Suffering	36
39	Chorus songs	39	Diner dessert	37
40	Rich dessert	40	Nogoodnik	38
			—“we there yet?”	39

### Yesterday's answer

S	T	A	R	S	F	L	A	T
Y	Y	D	L	B	A	R	E	D
Y	Y	D	L	B	A	R	E	D
Y	Y	D	L	B	A	R	E	D
Y	Y	D	L	B	A	R	E	D

**AXYLDAAXR** is  
LONGFELLOW  
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

### CRYPTOQUOTE

TED VSTWFO BAH ETN BN KDAEI RTVVAKFD NT WEODQVNBO, KWN BN KDAEI AHRTVVAKFD NT HAVWEODQVNBO.

-- PWAENAFABE

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is its style. The other is its content.

— fred rodell